

Traffic congestion costly, taxpayers association says

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During the slow crawl of a choked commute, drivers may want to use the time to consider why they're stuck in traffic.

That could be the key to less congestion for everyone.

Traffic congestion is stemming from a disconnect between the number of people driving at any time and the capacity of the road, according to a recent report by the Utah Taxpayers Association. The simple problem of too many people leaving at the same time and traveling the same roadway is costing drivers more than time in traffic, it's taking gas out of their tanks and dipping into their pocketbooks, too, the association said.

The reasons for congestion are mixed. Many wind along transportation corridors to get to and from work, yet others are visiting friends, shopping or are en route to the doctor's office. According to a study conducted by the Federal Highway Administration, the majority of trips made in the United States during both morning and afternoon rush hours are discretionary in nature.

While these discretionary trips may be necessary for drivers, the association would encourage commuters to avoid rush hour and travel during other times. By spreading the time people travel across the day, congestion could be subdued during peak hours, saving commuters time and money.

The association said that congestion imposes significant costs on commuters and truckers. It reported that the average Utahn spends more than the equivalent of three vacation days and an entire tank of gas idling in traffic each year. Utahns pay more than \$250 million every year because of traffic congestion, and this figure does not include what the public spends in taxes to construct and maintain roadways, according to the Texas Transportation Institute.

Nile Easton, senior public relations specialist for the Utah Department of Transportation, said that while there are numerous factors contributing to clogged roadways, the most cost-effective solution to the problem is drivers modifying their behavior. He cited Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr.'s executive decision to adapt the hours of operation for many state departments and agencies to a four-day, 10-hour schedule so staff could avoid congestion and reduce their offices' environmental impact daily.

Between 1982 and 2005, Utah's population increased by 64 percent, but the vehicle miles traveled by residents for the same time frame increased by 130 percent or by 14,233,000,000 miles, according to reports by the Federal Highway

Administration. The number of actual lane miles available to state drivers has only increased by 11,693 miles, a growth of about 105 percent.